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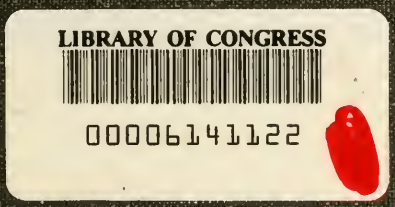

THE UNION—A BLESSING;

IT MUST BE PRESERVED!

A SERMON.

BY REV. L. MERRILL MILLER.

Delivered at the First Presbyterian Church, Ogdensburgh, N. Y.,
Sunday Evening, April 28th, 1861.

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CORRESPONDENCE.

OGDENSBURGH, April 29, 1861.

REV. L. MERRILL MILLER,

DEAR SIR:—Many who had not the pleasure of hearing your able and patriotic discourse last evening, express a desire to read it.—You will oblige your many Friends and aid the cause of our common Country, by furnishing a copy for publication.

Respectfully Yours,

John Fine.	J. W. Hopkins,	W. E. Guest,
A. B. James,	S. N. Sherman,	L. A. Pierce,
R. W. Judson,	Alric M. Herriman,	R. M. Barnes,
Geo. Hulburt,	Elijah White,	Stillman Foote,
D. M. Chapin,	B. H. Vary,	I. L. Seymour,
F. B. Hitchcock,	Smith Stillwell,	W. C. Brown.
	C. P Geer,	

OGDENSBURGH, April 30, 1861.

To Messrs. J. FINE, A. B. JAMES and others,

SIRS:—Your note asking for a copy of my Sermon, preached last Sabbath evening, has just come to hand. Yielding to your judgment and wishes, I herewith transmit it with the desire that it may aid your patriotic efforts in behalf of our beloved Country in this day of her peril.

Yours Truly,

L. MERRILL MILLER.

THE UNION—A BLESSING;

IT MUST BE PRESERVED.

A SERMON.

By Rev. L. MERRILL MILLER.

Destroy it not; for a Blessing is in it.—Isiah, 65 : 8.

Periods occur in the history of individuals when their destiny for life and eternity may be decided by the determinations and actions of an hour. At such a time, whatever may be the occasion, whether civil, political or moral, in which that person's interest is bound, he is under imperative obligations to consider and weigh his duty conscientiously and religiously.

In like manner occasions arise, when the *future* of a nation, and even its *existence* hang suspended on the decisions and actions of a day. Then the duties of the Patriot are to be measured by the standard of the Christian. Questions of civil policy and political action become eminently religious. They are to be decided by the voice of duty and the law of God. We are to carry them on our knees to the family altar, and into our retreats of silent communing and secret prayer.—Then it becomes the *Pulpit* to speak in all the wisdom it can command, and with all the christian love and fervor and integrity it can exercise and cherish. Such a period is upon us to-day. Our National existence is imperilled. The complete dismemberment of these United States is threatened. A principle is inaugurated which would resolve this great nationality, so honorable, so powerful, and so prosperous in the eyes of the whole world, into an indefinite number of petty confederacies, no one of which could reasonably expect long-continued peace at home or respect abroad. Not only is the welfare and happiness of the country invaded, but, what is of eminent importance to the child of God, the general interests of the Church of Christ are distracted, and the progress of his kingdom delayed.

We therefore use the language of the text, similarly to its application to the Jewish people, and say of our Union: "Destroy it not; for a blessing is in it." Let us consider the subject thus introduced by showing, first, The blessing in the Union of the United States; second, Regard its impending destruction; third, Our duty to prevent.

I. There is a blessing involved in the

existence of this Government and in the perpetuity of our Union. This blessing rises before us, as great and rich and varied, challenging all our powers of language to suggest or indicate it.

The American Nation has not experienced an existence of four score years since its recognition after a long and bloody struggle of seven years, and when its inhabitants all told numbered only three millions, and when heavy debts and delicate questions of consolidation encumbered it. Nevertheless, under the genial influences of our Republican form of Government and the signal endorsement of Divine Providence, we have reached a prosperity unparalleled in the history of all the nations of the world.—Our numbers have swelled to over thirty millions. Our possessions extend from the broad Atlantic to the great Pacific. They are washed by the clear, cold waters of the Northern Lakes and the St. Lawrence on the one hand, and the warmly-flowing Gulf-tides on the South. Countless millions of wealth are scattered over this great district, and everywhere peace and gladness, until a few days since, prevailed. The sound of the viol and harp were universally heard. Men went whither they pleased. They gathered in churches and worshipped at the beck of no voice except the voice of God, and the call of their own conscience. The press was unfettered, and men sat under their own vines and fig trees, with none to molest or make them afraid. Our ports and privileges and strong guarantees were open to the strangers of all nations, and the wearied and discontented and oppressed of many tongues and climes flocked thither for rest and laughed with pure delight under the shadows of our free institutions. Wherever the prows of our vessels ploughed distant waters, or the stars and stripes floated in foreign ports, princes and merchants have paid our country homage and blessed the *noble flag* as the harbinger of Freedom.—Our citizens travelling on a foreign soil have spoken with impassioned pride of the security and respect paid to them because they had their birth in the United States of America.

Now all this is prosperity unprecedented and marvellous, to be accorded to and enjoyed by a nation which has been acknowledged among the nations not yet quite eighty years. Still all this has been an actual existence. The thirty-four United States of America were crowned with it as with a garland of bays and rejoiced in it as a Queen, honored and loved above all the nobility of the earth. Instrumentally, under Providence, this is the fruit of our Republican institutions. This growth has been fostered and cherished under the benign influences of the Union. We have thought too little and been too little grateful for the blessings thus secured to us. The burdens of the Government have weighed upon us so lightly and been spread out over so broad a surface that we have been scarcely conscious of their presence, and have hardly realized through what channels they have come to us. And perhaps for that reason we have been led to speak of them lightly, blindly to tamper with them and recklessly seek to embitter the springs from whence they flow. If the thirteen original States had chosen to remain independent and to construct their own individual fortunes, irrespective of a solemn contract to make their destiny one and indivisible, surely no such prosperity could have been possible. Their union has been their strength. The liberal policy and strong arm of the general government have given us our prestige and our peace and plenty. Undoubtedly God has used these as the source of our

great blessings. And, while it is painfully and sadly true that we have forgotten properly to acknowledge Him as the author of our benefits, still it is equally true that without this Union and this liberal Government these things could never have been. Great therefore is the blessing in it.

And it is a blessing to have had the origin and ancestry that belong to this Republic. Our Fathers came here under the impulses of a pure conscience, and with the solemn intent of establishing a free government, securing to all "Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," granting freedom to cherish and utter their own opinions, and to worship God without the restraint of an oligarchy or a despotism.—They founded the Republic on the principles of an open Bible, reared its superstructure with prayer, and when it became necesssary, cemented its bonds with their blood. They were a noble galaxy of men from the beginning. And no Nation can point to a monumental record with so much just pride as can we, when on it we read in letters of living light such names as Washington, Adams, Livingston and Witherspoon, the eloquent Henry, Hamilton, Jefferson and Clay, the towering Webster, our own beloved Wright and the inflexible Jackson, with Franklin and Fulton, and Whitney and Morse, who has taught us to speak to each other, though thousands of miles away, in lightning words our love and union. Many like these names have given to the Union their most ardent love, and genius and lives. It is a record that shall span all earth's eternity, and shine conspicuous and of the first magnitude amid all its constellations.

It is, too, no small blessing that the rights of the individual citizen are respected, however humble they may be,and that the choice of their Rulers is the privilege and honor guaranteed to all the people. It is here publicly acknowledged that the private citizen has the right of petition and remonstrance against whatever he really believes to be oppressive and injurious in the administration of Government. The word of God speaks of the right to elect our rulers as a great privilege. "Their nobles shall be of themselves, and their Governors shall proceed from the midst of them. This is a privilege, which, though all nations have desired, very few have ever enjoyed.—Many an evanescent struggle has been made for it, and millions of men have in vain poured out their heart's blood to obtain it. But here this privilege is enjoyed in the largest degree. Our civil government is the only one in the world which is completely elective, and thus gives to the masses of the people, from the highest to the lowest, the right of uttering their wishes in regard to the person who shall rule over them without the least restraint. And the will of the majority expressed silently at the ballot-box becomes the law of the land, and the utterance of its might and its desire.

Then has not this union of States, in our noble Republican form of government, a blessing in it? Who shall sound its depths? Who shall tell us in words the sum of its influence for good at home and abroad? How will you too much magnify its growing position among the principalities of men? What great bloodless victories are achieved by its commerce, its moral force among the nations, and the aid it gives to the glorious cause of missions and the kingdom of Christ in the earth? God has signally honored us by the repeated outpouring of his Holy Spirit. He has largely built up the church of Christ, and through it sent hundreds to foreign lands to carry in glad words the messages of the ever-

lasting gospel. Who can tell the good thus accomplished? We have no arithmetic to measure the blessing conveyed to us and the world in these things. Nor have we on the other hand powers of computation to announce the guilt and crime of disintegrating this Union, thus constituted, and destroy this great blessing—dashing its cup of gladness with bitter bowls, and giving all our dear rights, privileges and expectations over to utter disappointment, dismay and death. "Destroy it not; for a blessing is in it."

"Who would sever Freedom's shrine?
Who should draw the invidious line?
Though by birth, one spot be mine,
Dear is all the rest;
Dear to me the South's fair land,
Dear the central mountain band,

By our altars, pure and free,
By our Law's deep-rooted tree,
By the past dread memory,
By our Washington;
By our common parent tongue,
By our hopes, bright, buoyant, young,
By the tide of country strong
We will still be one."

"Great God! we thank thee for this home,
This bounteous birth land of the free,
Where wanderers from afar may come,
And breathe the air of Liberty!
Still may her flowers untrampled spring,
Her harvest's wave, her cities rise;
And yet, till time shall fold her wing,
Remain earth's loveliest paradise!"

II. The destruction of this Government is threatened, the dissolution of the Union is inaugurated. I have now no partizan words to utter. I speak from the feelings of my love to the Union, as a Christian minister who beholds in the powers that be the ordinance and voice of God. I am also well aware that in the heat of debate and the strife of passion, many provocations have been uttered, and enacted, and reciprocated by partizans and extremists, North as well as South. Much bitterness has been caused by these things, yet at the same time I believe that for these neither the Republican nor the Democratic parties, as such, are responsible. The treasonable doctrine of SECESSION belongs to a party that demoralized and broke up the Democratic party both at Charleston and Baltimore, and only seized as the time and lame apology for treason the occasion of the election of Mr. Lincoln to the Presidency to be the period for inaugurating their work. President Jackson said, years ago, after he had quelled nullification, which was raised about the Tariff in South Carolina, that the Tariff was not the *cause*, it was simply the *occasion* of Rebellion, and then added that the effort will be made again by-and-by and the question of *slavery* will then be made the pretext for secession. So that the attempt to dissolve the Union is no *new* thing. The leaders in it have been quietly and in their own way preparing for it for years. Three years since, during my sojourn in Kentucky, a gentleman of that State boastingly said that in two years' time the South would inaugurate a general war for this very purpose. Hence in Kentucky last week a Union gentleman of distinguished ability and influence said that in their work of secession the ultra-politicians of the South were impelled by a life-long hatred of the Union; and by their action rendered the election of the Northern candidates inevitable, and then *used* the event of their election to produce hatred of the North and to precipitate State after State into the surging vortex of dissolution. In keeping with this declaration of facts the Kentucky *Tribune* printed last week in Danville, says: "We regard the late assault upon Fort Sumter as an act of unjustifiable aggression, an act of war, deserving the severest reprehension and the severest punishment;" and a recent speech of a member of Congress from the South takes the position and proves conclusively that "there is no right which either an individual or a State can ask but what is granted by the Federal Government, and that to consider secession as a remedy for any evil com-

plained of by our Southern rights friends is fallacious, and a step in the dark that will inevitably precipitate us all into one common destruction."

So that we must understand at the North, as it is openly avowed at the South, that the real design of the leaders in this rebellion against the Government, is the ruin of the United States, and the formation of another confederacy, established on a different basis, and having for its aim different designs and objects. It is estimated in certain quarters, so that we cannot misunderstand it, that many desire a Government with more centralization of power and less of the representative element—a pure oligarchy—where the few rule the many, with no voice of theirs in the matter. And on the part of others it is openly avowed, notwithstanding its denial in certain quarters, that the perpetuity and prosperity of the new confederacy are to be augmented by the re-opening of the slave trade; and thus in the cheaper production of cotton, and by an unlimited free trade, they believe the new confederacy would become rich and prosperous beyond all competition.—Neither of these objects could be obtained *in the Union*, therefore with desperate madness they would obliterate all traces of the Union at the South, seize its forts and arsenals, its bullion and navy, and desecrate its flag. Now they throw out the threat that they will occupy or destroy the Federal capital, and drive the Administration to some retreat in the North, if perchance they cannot destroy it utterly. Shall all this be done? This Union belongs to the people. Shall we, in whose hands its existence and safety are reposed, stand by and submit to such an attack upon all that belongs to us in the Union, and under the folds of the Stars and Stripes? We are not prepared for this. The old spirit of our Fathers is not so quenched within us. We are not so far removed from the memory of Washington, the heroes of '76 and the stirring tales of the Revolution.

But some one replies—"Why not allow the South to go its own way? In the Union there will be a constant irritation and conflict with them on questions growing out of slavery, so that a wise and peaceful policy calls for a separation. To this, doubtless, conservative men would long since have agreed. But this is not the question now at issue. We presume that if the Cotton States, or even the entire body of the Slave States, had really desired and asked for a separate confederacy, the great body of the Northern people would say at once, "let them have it," though deep might be the sorrow and sincere the regret to witness their departure. But if this is really desired, how shall it be effected? It can be done by a Convention of all the States called to alter the Constitution agreeably to its provisions. This would be honorable and peaceful. As the Union began in co-operation—where the voice of all the people has been heard through their representatives—so its dissolution can be righteously effected in no other way. But the South has never asked for such a convention, and we believe, if allowed a free expression of their opinions, they would not vote to call such a convention. The leaders at the South are scrupulously unwilling to submit anything important to their vote.

A second way in which a dissolution could be effected would be by Revolution, and this, if justified by proper consideration, would be right and virtuous.—The Gulf States, however, have not put themselves on this right, and have never complained of a grievance which cannot better be adjusted in the Union than out of it.

There is but one other plan of dissolution which is by secession, and which, unfortunately, the Gulf States have seen fit to adopt. We cannot submit to or recognize this action without self-destruction on the part of the whole Union. The doctrine of Secession assumes that we are not a nation, and have no right to exercise its functions if a State chooses to secede from its bonds. This idea is monstrous and fearful. It is opposed to the declarations of our most eminent statesmen and to the unanimous action of both North and South in past legislation. Mr. Madison, who drafted the Virginia State Rights Resolutions, was sternly opposed to the doctrine of Secession. Similar resolutions were passed in Kentucky in 1799. Dr. R. J. Breckinridge recently said expressly that any ordinance of Secession passed by the Legislature or Convention of any State is null and void; and William Collins, Esq., of Baltimore, in his recent address to the people of Maryland, uses the same language. The indissolubility of the Union by Secession was declared even in the articles of the old confederation. The present Constitution was adopted to effect a more perfect Union. How, then, can we assume the right of Secession which resolves the United States into a rope of sand? Henry Clay, who has been called "the Henry the Fourth of our Republic," asserted that "allegiance to the Union was a higher and more sacred duty than allegiance to any individual State," and it has been well said, that the doctrine of Secession throws the whole country into chaos. If one State may secede, any other may. If Florida, at the extremity of the Union, may go off and connect herself with a foreign nation, and thus command the Gulf of Mexico, so may Ohio, in the centre of the Union. If Louisiana may secede and obtain exclusive command of the mouth of the Mississippi, she thereby assumes the right not only of disposing of her own interests, but of controlling the whole Mississippi basin. Should Rhode Island go out of the Union and give herself to Great Britain, then an English fleet in the harbor of Newport would have command of the whole commerce of the United States, North of the Delaware. Legally and morally, these ordinances of secession are null and void, and should be so regarded and pronounced. Surely the people of this country are never going to submit to such a process of disintegration. They will never give up their life in this way. Death in some other way is preferable. If we were persuaded that the entire South were so blind to law and justice as to sanction such a doctrine, then so far from acquiescing in it, it would become us to resort to all possible means to save our national existence and prevent the onslaught of intolerable wrongs. We have already well-nigh submitted to it too long. By forbearance on the part of the Federal Government, and vain attempts at conciliation and long delay to resort to arms, treason has grown strong, and the advances of rebellion become boastful and formidable. If we now delay or linger, we shall be stranded by the fury of the gathering storm, and the monuments, and labors, and accumulations of many prosperous years will be scattered to the winds beyond recovery. What shall we do?

III. The text says, "Destroy it not." We are to regard the danger as imminent and great, and arouse ourselves to immediate and summary action. The time for mere talking is past. We have no choice or election in the case. The issue is thrown upon us, and we must stand up for the Union, or it will be thrown down. The last President did not seem to apprehend such an extreme of danger. President

Lincoln, also, seems to have been reluctant to admit it. But the sad issue has come and stares us in the face. The necessity of meeting it now cannot be averted. Hence, old party lines are properly abandoned. And there should be one rallying cry, "For the Union and the Stars and Stripes," until so bold a front is presented on the field of battle, and so heavy a blow directed, that our misled and misinformed brethren at the South shall understand that we are in solemn earnest, and are ready to commit ourselves to the care of the God of Battles for our institutions, our hearthstones, and our precious inheritance. In such a policy our highest safety now lies. Less blood will be shed and more profitable and salutary peace will follow.

Beholding how aggressive and bold and powerful this feeling of secession had become, I have been sick at heart during its progress under the fear that we had no Union, no Government, and that we should all drift away at the mercy of the storm. And when our President boldly spoke, announcing that a sense of the danger had reached the Capitol, then my heart sunk like lead in the fear that his call for aid would not find an adequate response. When recently I read that our Secretary of Legation had been murdered in Japan, and one of our Consuls insulted in the streets of Rome, I trembled for our honor and the security of our citizens' property abroad. It has been intimated on foreign shores and among certain philosophers, that our unexampled stride from a few weak colonies to a large and populous Republic, from our condition of poverty and heavy indebtedness to a state of great wealth and expanded commerce and strife for gain, would prove disastrous, and that the spirit of true patriotism would likely disappear, and that before the aggressions of tyranny and the assaults of war, even with the liberties of our native land at stake, we would sooner submit to an inglorious peace than a bloody victory. But we give thanks to God that our fears here have been groundless. In the millions of money which have been poured out like water, in the quick tramp of thousands of volunteers, in the readiness with which fathers and mothers have given their sons, ardent for the Union—in the unison of all parties, and the response of rich and poor, and of those who lead in our counsels of state, as well as those who are led, in all this we behold that love of country and patriotism are not dead.—When hundreds of mothers who have delicately brought up their sons to manhood in New-York can give one, and two, and three, and four of them with a "God speed you!" to the tented field, and then turn back to meet daily around the public altar of the sanctuary, to pray for God's blessing upon them—and when from all our villages and churches, as our own, our very communicants are rallying to the standard of the country, and all these churches are remembering them in prayer, there is room and ground for hope. But the conflict we may justly fear has only begun. Our duty has but just commenced in this new field. Let us now speak kindly and forbearingly of the Government. By all our influence let us sustain it. Let us cherish no hatred toward any—yield to no spirit of bitter recrimination over the past—forget old difficulties—speak kindly to and of each other. Let those *that can* be ready to go at the call of the Government, and those that remain at home bear their expenses.

Let us pray for our country North and South, and commend it continually to God. Pray for our rulers that they may have wisdom and courage to know and discharge their whole duty, And while

we pray for our volunteers (the communicants who have gone from our Church—the noble sons who have gone from our families—the whole-souled men who have left our homes at a moment's call)—let us not forget to pray for the brethren with whom we differ and with whom we are joined at issue—that God in whose hands are all our hearts—may cause us to look at each other again soon in peace and to strike hands once more and forever as brethren. Let us give ourselves up daily and constantly to the divine direction. No one can now, unaided by God's good Providence and spirit, tell what course it is best things should take in the settlement ultimately before us. Human wisdom is inadequate to the occasion. It is powerless over the problem of this crisis. But one thing we are sure can be, "God can issue this state of things exceedingly to the honor of his Son. And we can ask Him to do this." Let us ever remember and urge this plea. Let us with all earnestness do the right as conscience and opportunity bid us and say with the ancient leader of Israel: "In the Lord put I my trust, "I will not fear what flesh can do unto me," solemnly remembering our constitutional Covenant as members of these U. S., and our Spiritual allegiance to the King of Nations and Saints, may we like one man, *E pluribus unum*, serve God with all our hearts and all our trust and do our best for our country that its blessed bonds may be strengthened, and its fraternity and peace, and Liberty and Union may be preserved for ages to come. "Destroy it not; for a blessing is in it."

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